

Margaret Widdemer as a Prose Realist

THE town that is the setting for Margaret Widdemer's new book of short stories, *The Boardwalk*, belongs to that geography which maps Spoon River and Winesburg, Ohio. Here is the same small townism, the same harshness, the same interest in morbid meagre lives. But these stories have not the vigor of the others mentioned. Their clearness is smudged by a curious sweet-girl-graduate style that is incongruous with plots and matter of the "realistic" school; it's a style that seems strangely incongruous also with the style of a poet like Miss Widdemer.

Against her drab background of summer resort, boardwalk and all the year inhabitants she presents a combination of the most lurid melodrama with the most intricate and sensitive psychology. She touched with all assurance on the worryings and delicacies of an adolescent girl in her first love affair, and yet is not put out of countenance by a matter of sprinkling cocaine in her hero's cocktail. She is supremely matter of fact with both these situations. It is astonishing that she should be at once so objective and so deliberate and yet not freed from an unfortunate professional femininity of manner that does harm to her strong conceptions. J. C. M.

THE BOARDWALK. BY MARGARET WIDDEMER. Brace & Howe.

Tales From the Chinese

IF Lord Dunsany had written *The Chinese Wonder Book* he would have called it *The Chinese Book of Wonder*, and some of the purists would be better pleased. But this question of English won't worry the little Johns and Marys who read the book any more than its Chinese equivalent would the small Hop-Loos and Ti-Sangs. Norman Hinsdale Pitman has made a remarkably pleasant thing of the book, but it would be pleasanter if he had furnished a brief word of explanation. To be sure, there is a certain relief in opening a book and finding yourself right in its midst, but in this special case it is almost essential to know whether the stories are adaptations, translations or imitations, and we have nothing except our instinct and the illustrator's name, Li Chu-T'ang, to guide us.

When the mighty Yung-lo sits on the great throne surrounded by a hundred attendants, flirts his silken fan nervously and snaps his long fingernails in the impatience of despair, we want to know (before starting a crusade) if the loathsome fingernail snapping habit really did come from China. And if Mr. Pitman is responsible for

When Wang an invitation gets,
He chews and chews until he sweats,
But, when his own food he must eat,
The tears flow down and wet his feet—
he should have full credit. If these delightful fables are his own he ought to be awarded the Order of the Rising Sun for making Chinese story telling so attractive; and if they aren't we owe a great deal to all the story telling generations of Chinese mothers and fathers for making this rendition possible. C. M. G.

THE CHINESE WONDER BOOK. BY NORMAN HINSDALE PITMAN. Illustrated in color by LI CHU-T'ANG. E. P. Dutton & Co.

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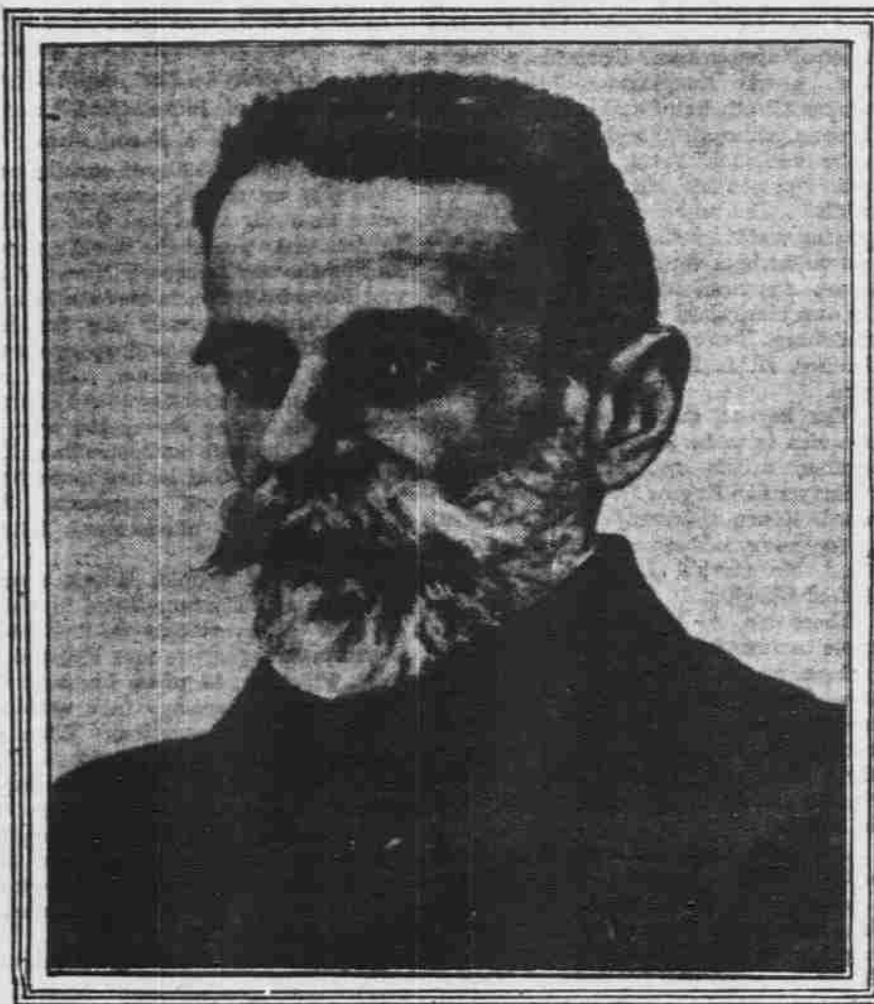
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Acclaiming the Premier Poet of Greece



Kostas Palamas.

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By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

THERE are few poets of whom it can be said that the only adequate review of their work would be to reprint all the poems in their books.

But Kostas Palamas, the greatest poet of modern Greece, whose *Life Immovable*, half of which has been translated by Aristides E. Phoutrides, is such a man—one who can be only justly reviewed by printing all of his beautiful poems. A Frenchman, Eugene Clement, has said in the *Revue des Etudes Grecques* that Palamas "is raised not only above other poets of modern Greece, but above all the poets of contemporary Europe. Though he is not the most known, he is incontestably the greatest." This may be true, for Verhaeren is dead and D'Annunzio is not yet "placed." But Kostas Palamas, if not "incontestably the greatest," will in time, I think, rank with Hugo, Whitman, Shelley, Nietzsche and D'Annunzio.

Kostas Palamas was born in Patras sixty years ago. In 1901 Dr. Phoutrides says he hated the name of Palamas, looking on him as a traitor to all that was great and glorious in the Greek literary tradition. To-day the Doctor has made the *amende honorable* by translating the man he once despised and writing a seventy page introductory analysis.

The story is a tragic and an extraordinary one. As related by Dr. Phoutrides it is almost incomprehensible to Anglo-Saxon minds, for we do not slaughter one another in the streets over literary or artistic matters. Conceive that celebrated night in Paris—in Europe, rather—nearly ninety years ago, when *Hernani* was put on the stage and Victor Hugo started his march against the Bastille of French classicism! Conceive that other day in Paris, many years after, when all Paris blocked the streets in dense masses around the kiosks waiting for Renan's *Life of Jesus*!

Still more tragic the scene in Athens a few years ago—1900—when the "Hairy Ones," among whom was Kostas Palamas, secretary of the University of Athens and the poet of the "anti-nationalistic faction," fought the Purists of Greek literature in the streets to the tune of eight dead and sixty wounded. They were the Gospel Riots. (Palamas himself took part in the struggle only in the spirit.)

It began with the translation of the New Testament into the "people's tongue." It ends to-day with the apotheosis of Kostas Palamas, who led the fiery spirits of New Greece against the subventioned calmed, numbed spirits of the past. An everlasting and healthy blood letting. Chimera teaching the Sphinx how to fly—always winding up by gouging out another chunk of granite from its hide. Palamas—called "the worst of them all"—broke all the aesthetic rules, and sneered and continued to break 'em. On the walls of Athens was scrawled, "Down with Pala-

mas! the bought one! the traitor!" But Palamas scrawled back, "The poet is the greatest patriot!"

To-day he is a brag on the lips of every cultured Greek—and in time he, too, will be academic dust. The ironic law of change!

Life Immovable is divided into five poem-cycles, *Fatherlands*, *The Return*, *Fragments from the Song to the Sun*, *Verses of a Familiar Tune*, and *The Palm Tree*. Passion, Ecstasy, Light, Art, Love—these are his Muses. In these matrices he has put everything from the death of a child—his own—to chants of the Great War. His is often the frenzy of Rodin's marbles, a "Praxiteles of Shadow," he sometimes calls himself; again "blood of my blood the madman was!"

The *Life Immovable* is the soul of the artist who has taken all life for his theme. It is Palamas himself socketed in his great vision cell whence he weaves his tapestries of light and color and melts his cosmic reactions to gleaming sentences. The sidereal planets "sweep in swift pursuit towards the world magnet of great Hercules"—but

"Only my soul like polar star awaits
Immovable, yet filled with dreamful long-
ings;
And knows not whence it comes nor where
it goes."

That is the major impression in all he writes. It is a complete union of the subjective and the objective in the poetic vision. The man controls his pen to the last flight sunward. He flies perfectly because his brain is as cool as his wings are furious in their heat. He is a Phaeton who has blueprinted his orbit on his brain. The spark immovable in his brain sets in flame all the rest of the world, but is never in any danger itself.

His *Fatherlands* are Patras, Athens, Missolonghi, Corfu, Mount Athos. These are perfectly chiselled bits, and must, in the original or a good French translation, recall a kinship to the technique of Charles Baudelaire and Theophile Gautier of *Enaux et Camées*. But his *Fatherlands* are not his all, for "I wore the shrouds of the poles."

There are magical poems in *Fragments from the Song to the Sun*. Palamas is a sun worshipper—a Pan-theist in the fullest and most sweeping sense of that word. Man and Nature are one, and both are beats in the breath of God. Here is his creed:

"Wounded with the mighty love
Of my mistress Life,
I wander on, her loyal herald
And her worshipper.
To thy mystic suppers call
Me not, O Galilean,
Prophet of the misty dream,
Denier of things that are!
Crowned with lotus, show me not
Nirvana's senseless bliss!
Yet, do thou, O Sun, shine forth
About, within, above;
Shine upon my love and make
A world of the Earth planet!
Shine life-giving with thy light,
O my Sun and God!"

In his exquisite *The Fairy*, the Sun is the "father of Health." It is the "fountain of the day." We are great "Gods of light." A fulgent, blazing, solar poet is this man.

Verses of a Familiar Tune contains *Thought*, which recalls to us Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. As I cannot read Greek, I cannot accurately compare them. The translation runs:

O Thought, thou angel, ever wrestling on
With a strong giant flinging his hundred
hands
About thy neck to strangle thee, wilt thou
Battle with sword or lily? Oh, the world
Will crumble ere thy struggle finds an
end!"

The Palm Tree is the longest poem in the book. Some blue flowers under a palm talk to one another. A passing poet records. It is mystical and Apocalyptic—guesses at the almighty riddle—you and me and the incomprehensible mystery of the sentence, Things exist.

"Things gray, things crystal, myriad hues
of green,
Gushings of fountains clear, and cater-
pillars

And little worms, and bees, and butterflies
... and mandolins ethereal."

A new world poet is come unto us.
Which is not an event, but an Event.

LIFE IMMOVABLE. BY KOSTAS PALAMAS. TRANSLATED BY ARISTIDES E. PHOUTRIDES. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.



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Dominey and which was the
Baron von Ragastein?



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